EXCISE

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6 March 1981

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Dear Senator Pell:

Following Under Secretary Buckley's meeting with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 26, you gave us a list of twenty-eight questions. I am pleased to enclose the answers that have been prepared by the Department of Defense and this Department.

Sincerely,

Alvin P. Drischler
Actirg Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosures:

As stated.

The Honorable
Claiborne Pell,
United States Senate.

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1. Q. To what extent have you consulted with the Saudis as you assessed this package? Have they indicated any flexibility?

A. -- We have been aware for some time of Saudi interest in obtaining additional equipment to enhance the capabilities of their F-15's and also obtaining an aerial early warning and surveillance capability. Over the past several months we and the Saudis have had several discussions about this matter.

-- We are continuing this dialogue with the Saudis and anticipate jointly working out with them the particular mix and amount of additional military equipment best suited to meet their desire for improved air defense capabilities. Neither we nor the Saudis have reached final decisions on all aspects of their military needs.

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2. Q: To what degree do you think the Saudis see these sales in political terms as a test of will -- as opposed to their military requirements for this equipment?

A: -- The Saudis believe that there is a pressing military need to enhance the capabilities of their F-15 aircraft and to acquire an airborne early warning capability. They see this need as arising out of the changed military situation in the area, including the increased Soviet threat exemplified by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

-- The Saudis believe it essential that they possess an improved air defense capability to deter external attack.

-- The Saudis do not see this a "test of the will" with the United States although our response inevitably will be viewed by the Saudis as an indication of US willingness to work together in pursuit of our common security objectives against the Soviet advance. They believe that the US shares an interest in the stability of the region and the defense of the Saudi oil facilities and that it is in our joint interest to improve Saudi Arabia's ability to protect its strategically important natural resources.

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3. Q: What do you believe the Saudis would do if these sales are not approved? Have they indicated any positive actions they might take in response to a US decision to sell the package? How might they respond to a compromise?

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A: -- These sales are one part of an overall strategy by which we want to convince the Saudis that we are very seriously committed to defending our friends in the region against the danger of the Soviet Union and the forces it controls. If, over the long term, we fail to convince Saudi Arabia of this commitment, we might see a dangerous evolution in Saudi attitudes away from us.

-- With regard to this particular part of our strategy, we would not expect Saudi Arabia to retaliate in some direct overt fashion against the US should we fail to supply these items. We believe the Saudi reaction rather would be one of deep disappointment and disillusionment. It would be at the critical margins of the relationship that our interests would suffer. Without confidence in the reliability of our commitment to the country's security, the Saudis may find it politically more difficult to take hard -- but from our standpoint necessary -- decisions regarding regional security, oil production and supply, international financial cooperation, and Middle East peace.

-- While neither we nor the Saudis expect direct linkages or trade-offs, we believe that helping to provide for Saudi security will improve the atmosphere in which we seek increasing Saudi cooperation in our strategy for securing the region against Soviet aggression.

-- If the sales of enhancement items are not approved, the Saudis could go elsewhere to procure the capabilities. The French appear to be willing to sell F-1s, Mirage 2000s and, later, the Mirage 4000 with air-ground capability. There have been indications that the Saudis may also be considering the European Tornado as an alternative. The UK has refueling aircraft and AWACS-type capability

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in their Nimrod. The Saudis could cancel the F-15 program (total cost: over $5 billion), although a recent (February 24th) signature on an F-15 logistics support package indicates their strong desire to maintain close ties to the US Government. Clearly, a Saudi move to non-US military equipment would reduce US influence with the Saudis and could, therefore, constitute a threat to Israeli interests as well as those of the United States.

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4. Q: Could you review the specific Saudi military justification for each item that they have requested? Do you believe their justifications are credible?

A: Conformal Fuel Tanks

-- Conformal fuel tanks would increase the range and/or mission time of the F-15s (the amount varies depending upon aircraft mission, flight profile, payload, etc.) and would allow the Saudis to conduct air defense missions over Eastern Province oil facilities from bases in the central and western part of Saudi Arabia. Without conformal fuel tanks, Saudi F-15s would have to operate from forward bases near the Gulf to be fully effective and would be more vulnerable to attack on the ground by aircraft from Iran or Iraq, for example.

-- The US agrees with this assessment.

AIM-9L Sidewinder Missiles

-- The AIM-9L missile is much more capable than current Saudi missiles. It can be fired effectively from any angle and thus would permit earlier engagement of hostile aircraft without time-consuming maneuvers. Such a capability could be crucial in intercepting attacking aircraft before they reached Saudi oil facilities.

-- The US agrees with this assessment.

Aerial Refueling Tankers

-- Refueling tankers, like CFTs, would extend the range and/or mission endurance of Saudi F-15s and improve their ability to carry out air superiority and combat air patrol missions. With this expanded range, the aircraft could stay on patrol longer and could operate effectively from bases in the western part of Saudi Arabia in defense of the eastern oil fields. They would thus be

much less vulnerable to attack on the ground by incoming aircraft.

-- The US agrees with this assessment.

Airborne Early Warning Aircraft

-- The Saudis desire an airborne surveillance system to provide the means of detecting low-flying aircraft far enough beyond Saudi borders (150 miles) to give Saudi air defenses adequate warning time to intercept the attacker before it reaches its target. This would discourage such attacks, thus significantly enhancing deterrence. Ground-based radars are inherently unable to detect low-flying aircraft at extended ranges and, thus, cannot duplicate this capability.

-- The US agrees with this assessment.

Multiple Ejection Bomb Racks

-- The Saudis desire to improve the air-to-ground capability of their F-15s to provide increased capability to counter a massed armored attack. They believe that, given the small size of their air force and the size of the territory they need to defend, it is only prudent to maximize the effectiveness of all of their aircraft.

-- The US will be working with the Saudis on how they might improve their air-to-ground capability to defend against invasion, examining a range of alternatives to MERs. for the F-15.

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5. Q. How do you assess the overall military threat to Saudi Arabia? To what degree does the proposed military equipment enhance their ability to defend against that threat?

A. The military threat to Saudi Arabia derives from four sources:

-- The Soviet Union against whom the Saudis would, of course, require massive U.S. assistance;

-- Soviet surrogates such as the Cubans working in conjunction with South Yemen;

-- the general volatility of the region; and,

-- the propensity of major powers such as Iraq and Iran to resort to armed force.

The proposed military equipment will act as an important deterrent to local aggression against Saudi Arabia and provide the basis for Saudi defense, and possibly defense cooperation with the U.S., in the event of actual attack.

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6. Q. Does every part of the Saudi royal family support this sale? If the sales were rejected, what impact would it have on internal Saudi politics?

A. Yes, our wide contacts with the Saudi royal family have shown that it is united in support of this sale.

If the sale were rejected, it would be seen as a personal rebuff of the Saudi regime and thus could damage the position of the royal family.

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7. Q: What have the Saudis said to us which bears on Israel concerns as to the enhancement package? Have we sought and have the Saudis given any assurances, beyond those already given in regard to the F-15s themselves?

A: -- The Saudis have consistently assured us that they have no offensive intentions against any state in the area. The Saudis have also emphasized that their need for the enhancement package is for defensive purposes.

-- Beyond these assurances, our maintenance and support role for the Saudi F-15s will give us critical practical control over their use.

-- Given these factors, we have neither sought nor have the Saudis given any additional assurances.

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8. Q. To what extent have you consulted with the Israelis on this request? What specific concerns have they expressed? Some see the Israeli reaction as surprisingly muted. Has the Administration pressed the Israelis to withhold comment?

A. The United States has discussed our proposals extensively with Israel. Israel has made it clear that they oppose arms sales to any Arab state. Israel is concerned that the items we have proposed could sufficiently enhance the range and capability of the F-15 to enable it to pose a threat to Israel.

We recognize that the systems we are proposing for sale would provide Saudi Arabia with additional capabilities and complicate Israeli defense planning. But, because of considerations such as Israel's highly effective air defense system and Israel's ability to retaliate effectively, which provide an effective deterrent as well as defense, we rate the risk of use of the Saudi F-15 against Israel as low. The Administration has not pressed Israel to withhold comment on our proposal.

9. Q: Some parts of the Saudi request pose greater threat to Israel than others. To what extent was this fact a part of your review of this issue? Could you review each item requested by the Saudis and evaluate its possible military impact on Israel?

A: -- We looked carefully at the effect that the sale of this equipment would have on the military balance in the region in general, and upon the security of Israel in particular. We want to be absolutely assured of the continued adequacy of Israel's defenses, and we have carefully considered Israel's concerns about the sale of this equipment to Saudi Arabia. Of course, if viewed in isolation from our overall strategy for the region, the Saudi F-15 enhancement items and airborne surveillance aircraft do not benefit Israel. In fact, viewed narrowly, providing arms to Saudi Arabia increases Israel's perceived military threat.

-- We do not believe that the sale of this equipment to Saudi Arabia poses a major threat to Israel. In our view, Israel's well trained and highly effective air defense system, including sophisticated aircraft such as the F-15 and F-16, and point defensive missile and gun systems, provides a substantial deterrent to any potential Saudi attack, with or without the additional equipment for the F-15s. The Saudis also know that the Israeli Air Force could strike back into central Saudi Arabia with devastating effect. In other words, commitment of Saudi forces against Israel would result in their almost inevitable loss, and would expose Saudi Arabia to attack from potential adversaries to the east and south.

-- The Saudis are well aware of this situation, and know that their forces are not well matched against the well equipped and highly trained Israelis, whether alone or in concert with other states in the region.

-- In sum, during our deliberations on this matter, we recognized that these systems do provide Saudi Arabia with additional military capability which the Israelis feel they must take into account. While obviously it is not possible to rule out absolutely the use of Saudi F-15s equipped with enhancement items against Israel, an objective analysis would rate both the likelihood of such use, and the probability of success in the unlikely event such use occurred, to be quite low.

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10. Q: What steps can be taken to help maintain Israel's faith in U.S. commitments if the 1978 assurances to Congress are broken?

A: -- We believe it is important that our friends can count on our reliability. We presently are consulting extensively with Congress and with Israel on the changed circumstances of the situation in the Middle East. We have asked the Congress to consider with us whether the 1978 undertaking continues to serve U.S. interests given the radically worsened strategic situation in the region and our new strategy for dealing with it. We have explained our views in detail in our discussions with Israel.

We do not believe that it is proper to characterize the transfer of these items as breaking the 1978 assurances. In fact we believe consultations and discussions such as these are the most effective way to ensure that Israel recognizes that our commitment to its continued security is firm and unshakable. Our consultations are intended to convey to Israel that our new overall strategy will enable us to make good on our commitment to its security, and that of our other friends in the area, in a much more effective way than we could before.

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11. Q: How do you assess Israel's current and projected capabilities to defend itself against a coordinated Arab attack?

A: -- It is our judgment that with a sustained effort and US assistance, Israel will be able to maintain its margin of military superiority over the Arab states during at least the next five years, and will remain capable of defeating any combination of Arab forces. Nonetheless, improvements in Arab military capabilities could make Israel's military preparations for a possible future conflict more complex and more costly.

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12. Q: If the F-15 enhancements are sold to Saudi Arabia, do you see a need to take compensatory measures in regard to Israel, such as giving additional military equipment or giving more help with financial problems?

A: -- We are not taking compensatory measures with Israel as part of the sale of F-15 add-on equipment to Saudi Arabia. As we have said, because of the changed situation in the region, and because Israel's strength is one factor in our overall strategy for resisting the Soviet thrust into this area, we are proposing to provide Israel with additional FMS credits for the purchase of aircraft or other equipment Israel may require. This is part of our ongoing dialogue with Israel about its security needs in the 1980's.

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13. Q: Could you detail for us the specific circumstances that have changed since May, 1978 which warrant changing the F-15 assurances contained in Secretary of Defense Brown's letter?

A: -- As Under Secretary Buckley described for the Committee on February 26, the profoundly worsened security situation in the Middle East/Persian Gulf region requires that we reassess and vigorously respond to the security needs of our friends. In describing this new approach, Under Secretary Buckley highlighted the events that have occurred in the region since 1978:

" -- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. There are currently 85,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan with an additional 35,000 troops actively engaged in support roles just over the Soviet border. As a result, Soviet tactical aircraft are now within range of the Hormuz Straits, through which 2/3 of the world's oil exports must pass.

-- The Iranian revolution which has turned a nation which once was an important factor in regional security into a major element of instability in the area. We are of course concerned about the potential for Soviet exploitation of the situation in Iran.

-- The Iran/Iraq war has demonstrated again the volatility of the region and the propensity of two major states there to resort to military force and to attacks on critical oil facilities.

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Add to these dramatic events the Soviet Union's position in Ethiopia and South Yemen: both of these Marxist states

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are tied to the Soviet Union and to each other by treaties of friendship and cooperation in which military cooperation is stated explicitly and prominently.

In sum, the Soviets have achieved a position which states in the region have long feared: an encirclement of the major Middle East oil fields, which threatens both the peoples of that area and the well-being of the industrial democracies.

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14. Q: Will the Saudi assurance concerning stationing F-15s at Tabuk be maintained? Is there any evidence that the Saudis want to station F-15s there or expand the hardened aircraft shelters there to accommodate F-15s?

A: -- There is no reason to believe the Saudis have modified the assurance they gave us regarding the stationing of F-15s. The Saudis intend to develop Khamis Mushayt, Taif and Dhahran, not Tabuk, as the main operating bases for the F-15.

-- There is no evidence that the Saudis have any plans to base F-15s at Tabuk or to build hardened aircraft shelters there to accommodate the F-15s.

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15. Q: Do you consider that any of the May, 1978 assurances are valid and binding upon this Administration?

A: -- We take assurances of this kind very seriously. As noted in the response to Question 13, it is the dramatically changed circumstances in the region and our own new strategy that have caused us to consult with the Congress regarding the assurances provided by the previous Administration in the May 8, 1978 letter from Secretary Brown. Apart from our decision to sell Conformal Fuel Tanks and AIM 9L Missiles to Saudi Arabia and later to provide early warning aircraft and an aerial refueling capability, we have not modified the positions that Secretary Brown outlined for the Congress.

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16. Q: Our calculations indicate that with the conformal fuel tank, a round-trip F-15 mission from Taif could reach Jerusalem only on an air-to-air mission and not for bombing missions (see maps). Can you confirm these calculations?

A: -- These calculations are correct. The distance from Taif to Jerusalem is approximately 680 Nautical Miles (NM). In a typical air-to-air mission, an F-15 with Conformal Fuel Tanks (CFT) and two 600 gallon External Fuel Tanks (EFT) (maximum fuel load), has a combat radius of about 850 NM. Therefore, Jerusalem is within this operating range. For practical purposes, (Hi-Lo-Hi) profile, and an air-to-ground configuration, Jerusalem is outside the F-15's combat radius even with conformal fuel tanks. This is because:

-- (i) aircraft armed with air-to-ground munitions consume more fuel than when armed with air-to-air missiles; and

(ii) low altitude penetration (necessary in a high-threat environment such as Israel) consumes more fuel.

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19. Q: If the MER-200 for Saudi Arabia is still under study, does this mean they might be sold in the future? Since they are relatively inexpensive items ($50,000 each), would this not fall under the ceiling for Congressional review? Would Congress be consulted?

A: -- The Saudi requirement for the MER-200 will be studied in the context of the overall Saudi Arabian defense requirement. We could not come to a conclusion on valid Saudi needs for the MER-200 until such a study is completed. Should a requirement for the MER-200 be validated by the U.S. the number of MER-200s envisioned may not meet the dollar threshold for formal notification of the Congress (36B requirement). However, we definitely intend to consult with the Congress before approving any sale of MER-200s.

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20. Q: Is it not true that KC-135's refueling tankers are no longer in production and the existing aircraft are badly needed for the U.S. Air Force? How could we provide them to the Saudis if we wanted to?

A: -- Yes, it is true that the KC-135 tanker is no longer in production and the USAF is short of the number which it requires. If approval were given to provide a boom aerial refueling capability to the Saudis, the preferred position would be to provide them with an available tanker aircraft (not KC-135s). The possible alternatives would be a KC-707 (a proposed Boeing modification to the 707), a KC-747 (a modified 747 similar to those sc to Iran), a KC-10 (modified Dc-10 under development for the USAF), a KC-130H with boom or some other alternative. The earliest expected delivery of one of these tankers to Saudi Arabia would be the mid-1980s. Further detailed information on a proposed tanker sale must await the results of U.S./Saudi technical evaluations of the tanker alternatives. Any sale would require formal notification of the Congress.

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21. Q: Is it not true that with the KC-135 tanker, U.S. F-15s have flown non-stop directly from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia?

A: -- U.S. F-15 aircraft have not flown non-stop, with KC-135 support, from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia. On 13 January 79, 18 F-15 aircraft, with KC-135 support, flew non-stop from Langley AFB, VA to Lajes Airfield in the Azores. On 14-15 January 79, 12 of the F-15s, with tanker support, deployed non-stop from the Azores to Saudi Arabia, with 6 aircraft going to Riyadh and 6 to Khamis Mushayt.

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24. Q: If the Saudis bought the AWACS, would they be able to operate it alone during the next decade? Would U.S. military or contract people fly the AWACS operationally for the Saudis? What are the implications?

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A: -- If an Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft were released to the Saudis, first deliveries would occur in CY 85 or CY 86. The Saudis could be trained to operate and maintain an AEW within a few years using a combination of US military and contractor trainers. However, due to manpower constraints it is unlikely that the Saudis would be able to assume the full responsibility for AEW maintenance without substantial contractor support for the foreseeable future.

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25. Q: If the Saudis do not get the KC-135 tanker, could they use AWACS effectively?

A: -- Yes, the Saudis could still make effective use of AEW if an aerial refueling aircraft were not made available to them. It would, however, significantly increase the number of AEW aircraft required to perform a given mission. The unrefueled endurance of AWACS, for example, is 11 hours; an AWACS refueled twice in flight has a flight endurance time of 22 hours. Thus, for example, if it was desired to maintain 24-hour surveillance of a given orbit for an extended period of time, approximately five AWACS would be required with refueling. Without aerial refueling this requirement increases to at least ten AWACS (sortie rates have a greater impact on maintenance and aircraft requirements than sortie length). The resultant problems in providing Saudi crew members, controllers, and maintenance personnel to maintain and operate such additional aircraft would exacerbate the already formidable manpower problems facing the RSAF.

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Saudi manpower. More importantly, ground based radars do not provide adequate coverage nor do they provide adequate warning time. The low level range of ground based radars is limited to about 20 miles over flat terrain (as found along the Persian Gulf coast) by the curvature of the earth and does not provide adequate warning time to locate, identify, scramble and intercept aircraft transiting the Gulf, for example, from bases in Iran. Hence a combination of airborne surveillance aircraft and ground radars provides the most cost effective solution to the overall air defense problem.

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27. Q: What would be the impact on an Israel-Arab war if the Arab forces had AWACS?

A: -- If the Saudis employed AEW aircraft in such a war, and if the Saudis had a detailed plan of cooperation with other Arabs, it would extend radar surveillance in support of air defense, counter air, and limited offensive (interdiction) operations. However, without procedures and, more important, equipment for interoperability and connectivity as well as intensive joint (inter-Arab) training in their use, its effectiveness would be limited. This equipment would have to include sophisticated computerized communication and data processing gear. Even if these severe obstacles were to be overcome, the primary contribution of an Arab AWACS would still be in defensive operations.

28. Q: Is AWACs technology any less sensitive to security breaches today than it was four years ago, when it was considered for sale to Iran?

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A: -- Although AWACs technology is still sensitive, it is in fact, four years older than when a sale was proposed for Iran.

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